

Remarks at the U.S. Consulate General Reception
In honor of the 236th Anniversary of Independence
of the United States of America
By U.S. Consul General Valerie Belon
July 3, 2012

Good evening. Buenas noches. Goedenavond. Bon noche. Bon bini.

Masha danki pa yuda nos ku nos selebrashon di e di doshenti-trintiseis aniversario di independensha di Merka.

Te ahenda mi ta siñando Papiamentu. Pesei, mi ta preferá sigui mi speech na Ingles.

Masha masha danki.

As I said, I am delighted that all of you could join us today to help us celebrate the 236th anniversary of my country's independence.

I would like to recognize several of our most distinguished guests and I apologize in advance if I miss anyone important or mispronounce your names.

From Curacao

Governor Frits Goedgedrag
Prime Minister Gerrit Schotte
Deputy Prime Minister Charles Cooper
Finance Minister George Jamaloodin
Justice Minister Elmer Wilsoe
Economics Minister Nasser Hakim
General Swijgman

From Aruba

Governor Fredis Refunjol
Infrastructure Minister Benny Sevinger

I would also like to recognize former Netherlands Antilles Prime Minister Mrs. Emily De Jongh-Elhage.

I am deeply honored by the presence of all three Governors, the PM and all the Ministers who have come today, particularly those who travelled from other islands. Thank you.

Governors, Prime Minister, Ministers, honored guests,

For me, it is a great honor and a unique privilege to represent the United States of America to the six islands of the Dutch Caribbean – your islands – the Caribbean portion of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Thank you for joining us to make this special occasion even more special by your presence. A celebration not just of our Independence Day, but also of our enduring friendships and partnerships throughout the Dutch Caribbean.

For my colleagues, our uniformed U.S. military service members and my fellow Americans, Happy Independence Day. As you know, freedom is not free. So, on this day, we also honor and remember the many who sacrificed to create and preserve our freedoms.

As President Obama once said, “Today, we are called to remember not only the day our country was born – we are also called to remember the indomitable spirit of the first American citizens who made that day possible. We are called to remember how unlikely it was that our American experiment would succeed at all; that a small band of patriots would declare independence from a powerful empire; and that they would form, in the new world, what the old world had never known – a government of, by, and for the people.”

Some of you may have notice that all six islands are listed alphabetically on my business cards and the signature I use on emails. That is because I love them all equally, appreciating the unique treasures that each island offers. This week, I have the special privilege of celebrating our Independence Day three times on three different islands – today here with you, tomorrow in Aruba, and on Thursday for the first time ever, I will be hosting a smaller celebration in St. Maarten. How great is that? Three days, three islands, three celebrations. I have the best job in the world!!

Based here in dushi Korsou, my twenty-two months here have gone by very quickly. Time flies when you’re having fun. My daughter and I have formed many cherished friendships which I’m sure will last a lifetime. Thank you for welcoming us into your communities and enriching our lives with your Caribbean hospitality.

Some of you may have noticed that we have some ongoing construction projects here at the consulate. Please excuse our mess. But this is an appropriate metaphor for the partnerships we are constructing through the Dutch Caribbean. I worked closely with the Obama Administration as it was defining its policies toward Latin America and the Caribbean. President Obama first articulated the Obama Administration’s policies in this region at the Summit of the Americas in nearby Trinidad in 2009 and reaffirmed them recently at the Summit in Cartagena. (He said thanks for taking such good care of his airplane and crew, by the way.) Anyway, from both Summits, one theme that has not changed is that the United States is eager to work with willing partners to address common interests and shared challenges. We don’t have all the answers, nor do we have unlimited resources. Partnerships are therefore key.

First and foremost we have built partnerships to address **Counter-trafficking and Security**. Making sure the Caribbean is a hostile place for traffickers to do business will make your islands

safer and will also protect the United States from the terrible scourge of illicit drugs. We are working hard to fight organized crime together, whether it be trafficking in persons, weapons, or narcotics. We can only be successful if we pool our resources and work as partners.

Fighting transnational crime and improving regional security also translates down to the local level, to security on the streets. We are building partnerships to maximize safety and security for the three million Americans who visit this consular district every year. These efforts will also help ensure your islands are safe and secure for residents and visitors alike and that your tourism sectors will continue to grow and thrive.

We share a common history for good and for bad. Years of slavery and racial discrimination are examples. We still have a long way to go, but I am immensely proud that I can say my boss is the first African-American President of the United States of America. We've come a long way. We also share a history of melting pot immigration and religious tolerance. A year after Peter Stuyvesant was Director of the Dutch West Indies colony headquartered in Curacao, he was sent to New Amsterdam, which we Americans affectionately call New York. A century later, the Caribbean portion of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was the first to recognize the new nation of the United States of America, when Fort Oranje on St. Eustatius fired its famous first salute to a vessel of the revolutionary American Navy in 1776.

236 years later the Dutch Caribbean and the United States of America still share a special bond as close allies and dear friends.

Before for I read a message to all of you from Secretary Clinton, I wanted to sincerely thank my staff for their tireless efforts over the last several weeks to put this event together. My deputy Eric Kramp, my office manager Nicole Rosa, our financial specialist Marianela Gonzalez, also Thonny de Sousa Pereira, Mariola Benito, Morgan Miles, Danice Domacasse, Rob van Reusel, Armino Huerta, Jeffrey van Sichem, Ariel Garcia-Franco, Humphrey Mendez, Arecely Tapasco-Garcia, Hilda Stephens, Team Iguana at the FOL and numerous others. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I also wanted to express appreciation for the generosity of our sponsors. Without them, tonight's event would not have been possible. Before the fireworks, which are scheduled to begin at 8:15pm, we have another special surprise in store for you, which will – in addition to the food and music – will highlight the similarities of local and New Orleans culture.

MESSAGE FROM U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON

To all who are gathered at our embassies and consulates around the world to celebrate the Fourth of July.

Dear Friends:

It gives me great pleasure to wish you a very happy Independence Day!

While for most Americans the Fourth of July means barbecues, fireworks, and all things red, white, and blue, to those of you abroad, these symbols are all the more special. Each and every day you work hard to represent our country and share our culture and values with our friends and partners across the globe. Today we mark the 236th anniversary of the birth of our nation, and celebrate its founding principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are not just American values, they are universal values, and so today is also a celebration of our common humanity.

As you celebrate, I hope you find time to reflect on America's rich history of progress toward fulfilling the promise of our founding and making our country a force for peace and prosperity. Remember, too, all those around the world today who are fighting to claim their universal human rights. We are proud to stand with them and to affirm that the ideals of freedom and opportunity we cherish are truly universal.

Please know you have my best wishes for a safe and happy Fourth of July.

With warm regards, I am

Hillary Rodham Clinton

With that, I would like to offer a toast. Governors, Prime Minister, Ministers, honored guests, colleagues and fellow Americans. To the United States of America, now 236 years old, and to our friends and partners here in Curacao and throughout in the Dutch Caribbean. Viva! And, in good 'ol New Orleans tradition, laissez les bons temps rouler!